

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT LISBON 2860 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BONN LONDON MADRID

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QUOTE

CONFIDENTIAL LISBON 2860

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, PO

SUBJ: REPUBLICA CRISIS

REF: LISBON 2801

SUMMARY: DISPUTE OVER SOCIALIST NEWSPAPER "REPUBLICA," FOMENTED BY COMMUNIST UNION, HAS ERUPTED INTO MAJOR POLITICAL PROBLEM AS SOCIALISTS REACT BY FLEXING POLITICAL MUSCLE. MINISTER OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION CORREIA JUSUINO RESPONDED BY CRITICIZING SOCIALISTS AND CLOSING NEWSPAPER ON MAY 21. MINISTER ACCUSED SOCIALISTS OF SABOTAGING REVOLUTION BY POLITICIZING A PROBLEM WHICH SHOULD BE DEALT WITH THROUGH JUDICIAL PROCEDURES. SOARES TOOK TO STREETS IN SUPPORT OF REPUBLICA EDITOR RAUL REGO RESULTING IN CONFRONTATION WITH COPCON SECURITY FORCES. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING IS AN UP-DATE OF COMMUNIST-INSPIRED ATTEMPT TO WIN EDITORIAL CONTROL OR OTHERWISE SILENCE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST

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NEWSPAPER "REPUBLICA." ATTEMPT FOMENTED BY RIGGED ELECTIONS

WITHIN GRAPHIC WORKERS UNION (PRINTERS) AT REPUBLICA WHICH GAVE PURPORTED MAJORITY TO FACTION OPPOSING NEWSPAPER'S EDITORIAL IDENTIFICATION WITH SOCIALIST PARTY. ON PRETEXT OF REPUBLICA'S DEFICIT FINANCIAL POSITION - WHICH HAS CHRONICALLY BEEN SERIOUS BUT NEVER FATAL - WORKERS CALLED FOR REPLACEMENT OF OUTSPOKEN EDITOR RAUL REGO BY BUSINESS MANAGER BELO MARQUES. REGO IS WELL KNOWN AS A CRUSTY SOCIALIST WITH EXCELLENT CREDENTIALS AS A LONG-TIME OPPOSITIONIST TO THE SALAZAR/CAETANO REGIMES. BELO MARQUES, ALSO A SOCIALIST, IS KNOWN AS AN OPPORTUNIST. EDITORIAL STAFF NEARLY UNANIMOUS IN SUPPORTING REGO.

2. NEW PRESS LAW GIVES A NEWSPAPER'S EDITORIAL BOARD THE RIGHT TO DETERMINE EDITORIAL POLICIES. DEMANDS BY THE PRINTERS FOR CHANGES IN THE EDITORIAL STAFF HAVE NO LEGAL JUSTIFICATION. WORKERS ATTEMPTING TO DEPICT ISSUE AS DEFENSE OF AN "APOLITICAL" EDITORIAL POLICY AND STATED THAT ONCE EDITORIAL STAFF LEFT REPUBLICA'S OFFICES THEY WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO RETURN.

3. SEVERAL THOUSAND SOCIALISTS DEMONSTRATED DURING NIGHT OF MAY 19-20 IN FRONT OF REPUBLICA'S OFFICES IN SUPPORT OF EDITORIAL STAFF, WHICH WAS INSIDE BUILDING NEGOTIATING WITH WORKERS COMMISSION. SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER MARIO SOARES PERSONALLY PASSED OUT CIRCULARS IN LISBON'S MAIN PLAZA ANNOUNCING DEMONSTRATION AND CALLING FOR "LIBERTY OF INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION," AND DEFENSE OF "ONLY INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE PORTUGUESE PRESS."

4. COPCON FORCES IMPEDED PRO-SOCIALIST CROWD FROM ENTERING REPUBLICA'S OFFICES. MARIO SOARES, SALGADO ZENHA, AND OTHER SOCIALIST LEADERS ALSO NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER. SOARES ENGAGED IN HEATED ARGUMENT WITH COPCON OFFICIAL, ACCUSING COPCON OF TRYING TO MAKE REPUBLICA INTO ANOTHER AVANTE, THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER. FIVE ARMORED VEHICLES ARRIVED TO JEERS OF CROWD. PRINTERS IN BUILDING WERE TAKEN FROM BUILDING IN ARMORED VEHICLES. CROWD ATTEMPTED TO RUSH BUILDING AND TROOPS FIRED VOLLEY OF SHOTS INTO AIR.

5. DISPUTE FOLLOWING CLASSIC PATTERN WHICH COMMUNIST MINORITY HAS USED, WITH VARIATIONS, TO GAIN CONTROL OF OR HEAVILY INFLUENCE ALL DAILY NEWSPAPERS EXCEPT REPUBLICA, EXPRESSO, AND JORNAL NOVO, ALL RADIO STATIONS (EXCEPT RADIO RENASCENCA), AND CONFIDENTIAL

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THE STATE TELEVISION MONOPOLY.

6. THIS IS FIRST TIME SINCE THE APRIL 25, 1974, REVOLUTION THAT LARGE, NON-EXTREMIST CROWD HAS OPENLY CONFRONTED TROOPS WITH TAUNTS AND JIBES. TROOPS TAKEN ABACK BY REACTION, PROTESTED THEY WERE ONLY DOING THEIR JOB, AND CIRCULATED THROUGH CROWD SAYING THEY WOULD NOT FIRE ON THE PEOPLE. (THIS FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT COPCON HAVING DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS CURRENTLY ENDEMIC

TO REST OF PORTUGUESE MILITARY.)

7. PROMPT INTERVENTION OF MINISTER OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION CORREIA JESUINO IN DISPUTE HAS RESULTED IN REPUBLICA'S OFFICES BEING CLOSED UNDER SEAL AND MATTER BEING REFERRED TO AUTONOMOUS PRESS COUNCIL FOR A DECISION BASED ON NEW PRESS LAW. JESUINO CALLED THE AFFAIR "DIVISIONIST MANEUVER WHOSE ONLY AIM IS TO SABOTAGE THE REVOLUTION." PRESS COUNCIL WILL CONVENE IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION MAY 22 TO CONSIDER PROBLEM.

8. ALTHOUGH COMMUNISTS HAVE TEMPORARILY ACHIEVED THEIR OBJECTIVE OF SILENCING REPUBLICA - AT LEAST FOR A LIMITED PERIOD - THEY HAVE DONE SO AT COST OF PROVOKING A STRONG PUBLIC REACTION. THE SOCIALISTS AND PPD SEE THIS AS GUT ISSUE WHICH, IF LOST, FORESHADOWS UNCONTESTED DOMINATION OF THE MEDIA BY THE COMMUNISTS. OUTCOME IS ISSUE REMAINS UNCERTAIN BUT POLITICAL TENSIONS ARE RISING AS SOCIALISTS FEEL THEMSELVES BACKED AGAINST THE WALL.
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